

The WPA Posters Project

by Bryan Willard

1. **Subject and Lesson Plan Code:** Social Studies / SS-1
2. **Grade Level/Course:** Grade 11 / American History II (Gilded Age – Present)
3. **Title:** **The Impact of WPA posters on Great Depression Era America**
4. **Alignments:** PDE History Standards (8.1.12.A,B,C,D & 8.3.12.A,B,C,D)
5. **Vocabulary:** WPA (Works Progress Administration)
Great Depression
New Deal
Franklin Delano Roosevelt
Relief, Recovery, Reform
6. **Objective(s):**
 1. TSWBAT research WPA posters on the loc.gov website.
 2. TSWBAT identify the purposes of four WPA posters.
 3. TSWBAT create a first person account of an American living during the Great Depression inspired by the four posters he or she chose.
 4. TSWBAT fabricate a WPA style poster that pertains to the current society we live in but also would have been applicable to 1930's America.
7. **Essential Question(s):**

EQ1: How were WPA posters used during the Great Depression to enact Relief, Recovery, and Reform?

EQ2: Were the WPA posters a good reflection of the reality that Americans were experiencing during the 1930's?

EQ3: How is art and advertisement used by the US government today to perpetuate its programs and agendas?
8. **Duration:** (2) 78 minute periods for the “A Great Depression Tale” assignment
9. **Materials :** computer access, paper and art supplies for creating a poster

10. **Suggested Instructional Strategies:** iconographic analysis, creative process, inferences, forming opinions and supporting them

11. **Instructional Procedure(s):**

W	Chronology/Teacher Discussion/Classroom Activities/Primary and Secondary Documents/Lesson Plan Previewing/Assessment Explanation
H	Iconography/First Person Accounts/Video/Discussion
E	Connections With The Present/Multiple Intelligences Activities and Formative Assessments
R	Discussion/Peer Evaluation/Engaging Activities/Using The History
E	Art/Writing/Orally/Peers
T	Multiple Intelligences/High And Low Questioning
O	Develop Ownership/Emphasize The Student's Role/Citizenship Aspect

- A. Prior to this lesson, students should be exposed to the roots of the Great Depression, the severity of the living conditions for most Americans, and the programs FDR and Congress created to combat it.
- B. Administer the “A Great Depression Tale” assignment to the students.
- C. After the students complete the “A Great Depression Tale,” have the students share with their peers their final products and opinions on the WPA poster program.
- D. Finally, lead a full class discussion on the WPA poster program and solicit the opinions of the students concerning the modern US government’s art/advertising campaign, how it differs from the WPA posters, and the controversies that arise with state sponsored art/advertising.

12. **Formative Assessment:** The “A Great Depression Tale” assignment assesses the students’ extent of learning.

13. **Related Materials & Resources:**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/highlights.html>

A Great Depression Tale

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/highlights.html>

The object of this assignment is to use the Library of Congress's collection of Great Depression era WPA posters to produce a day-in-the-life story of an average American. Write a first person account as if you were living during the Great Depression in the 1930's and describe the things you would have seen and done. Choose four WPA posters from the LOC's collection that will determine your story's path. Interpret each poster and explain how it relates to your life in at least one full paragraph. include analysis as to whether or not the posters' advertisements are effective in initiating relief, recovery, and reform in your day-to-day struggles in the Great Depression.

Incorporate into your story a fabricated poster that you hand-draw and color. The idea for this poster should come from your imagination but should fit into FDR's three pronged attack on the Great Depression of relief, recovery, and reform. Interpret this poster as you did for the others and explain how it relates to your life in at least one full paragraph. Your fabricated poster can appear anywhere in your story, wherever it is most fitting.

Finally, in a separate paragraph, comment on posters that the present US government might sponsor to forward its programs and agendas and whether state sponsored art is controversial because of the control the state exerts over it.

Examples



I was on my way to the grocery store today when I noticed a WPA poster about having my eyes checked to determine if I need eye glasses. It has been more than two years since I had my eyes checked and I have noticed that it is getting more difficult for me to see distant objects. Unfortunately I'm struggling to put enough food on the table with the little money that my family earns and therefore that visit to the eye doctor is going to have to wait.

I walked out of the grocery store straight into an advertisement for Yellowstone National Park. I remember my father telling me stories about it when he visited there as a young man. It has always been my dream to take my family and show them the wonders of our first national park, but that dreams appears more elusive everyday. It is frustrating to see these beautiful pictures of America with the realization that I might never be able to see them in person. Sometimes I wonder why the WPA creates such artwork. It is a torment to me sometimes.

